

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1965

As Reported by House Committee On:
Higher Education

Title: An act relating to tuition and fee assistance for teachers seeking additional education.

Brief Description: Providing tuition waivers for teachers seeking additional education.

Sponsors: Representatives Ericks, Strow, Haler, Linville, O'Brien, Santos and Chase.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Higher Education: 2/22/05, 3/1/05 [DPS].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Provides additional moneys from the State General Fund for bonuses to teachers who have obtained a professional certificate.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 12 members: Representatives Kenney, Chair; Sells, Vice Chair; Cox, Ranking Minority Member; Rodne, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Buri, Fromhold, Hasegawa, Jarrett, Ormsby, Priest, Roberts and Sommers.

Minority Report: Without recommendation. Signed by 1 member: Representative Dunn.

Staff: Sydney Forrester (786-7120).

Background:

The State Board of Education (SBE) is charged with approving teacher preparation and certification programs offered at Washington's institutions of higher education. In 1997, the SBE revised the teacher certification rules to require the earning of a professional teaching certificate. Under the professional certificate program, teachers first earn a residency certificate that is valid for five years. Teachers then begin the process of earning a professional certificate that is renewed every five years through completion of an individualized professional growth plan.

The professional certificate program is intended to be a performance-based system of teacher preparation and certification. Teachers are asked to demonstrate competency in specific knowledge and skill areas deemed to have a positive impact on student learning. For teachers

holding a residency certificate, the five-year process sequence to earn a professional certificate includes: completion of the first year of teaching; application to an approved program; completion of a pre-assessment seminar; completion of core credits; and completion of the culminating seminar.

The professional certification programs offered at the various institutions of higher education may differ in seminar content, credit designations, timelines, core structure, and cost. Some institutions offer professional certification only as part of a master's degree program, while others offer professional certification separate from a master's program, or professional certification only. A minimum of 15 college credits is required in any professional certification program, although an approved program could include more than 15 credits at a particular institution.

The salary allocation model for K-12 teachers reflects pay increases for years of service and for the earning of post-baccalaureate credits at the 15, 30, 45, and 90 credit steps. The state also allocates additional monies for teachers with a master's degree; a master's plus 45 credits; a master's plus 90 credits; and a master's with a doctorate degree. The salary allocation model currently does not include specific recognition of a professional certificate, but the college credits earned in the professional certification program are recognized.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

The state will provide additional moneys for a bonus to teachers who have obtained a professional certificate. The additional funding will be 10 percent of the base salary for a teacher with a bachelor's degree and zero years of experience on the salary allocation model for certificated instructional staff. School districts may use the additional moneys only to provide bonuses for teachers who have obtained a professional certificate.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:

The original bill created a mandatory tuition waiver for teachers pursuing either a professional certificate or a master's degree at a public institution of higher education. As a condition of receiving the waiver, teachers were required to teach at a public school for a minimum of five years after obtaining the certificate or degree. A teacher who did not fulfill the teaching obligation would incur a repayment obligation equal to 20 percent of the amount of the waiver for each year of the required five years the teacher did not teach in a public school. The Higher Education Coordinating Board was directed to adopt rules to administer the program. The substitute bill provides additional monies for teachers who have obtained a professional certificate and includes a null and void clause.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on March 2, 2005.

Effective Date of Substitute Bill: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed. However, the bill is null and void unless funded in the budget.

Testimony For: Back in the 1970s a program was established calling for law enforcement officers to attend college for professional development. The purpose was to upgrade the profession through postsecondary education. Officers who entered the program had their college debt forgiven in exchange for their service in law enforcement.

The purpose of this bill is to benefit young teachers who are sincerely dedicated to teaching, most of whom have huge debts already incurred to achieve their teacher status. This bill is designed to channel teachers into the state's public schools instead of having them move out of state. We also want to invest in, and with, teachers in their continued education.

The Washington Education Association (WEA) supports including salary recognition or loan forgiveness for teachers earning a professional certificate. The teachers must coordinate the process to obtain a professional certificate and the costs for the college credits range between \$600 to \$4,500. New teachers are expected to achieve a professional certificate within the first five years of teaching. Many of the issues around the professional certificate have been brought to the House Education Committee and they are trying to improve this program. There is little or no financial reward for obtaining a professional certificate so teachers are having to also obtain a master's degree as well in order to see any salary advancement. We need to find ways to provide rewards for teachers that will encourage them to continue their careers in Washington. Teachers have reported that the work involved in obtaining the professional certificate includes much more than is reflected in the 15 college credits earned in most cases.

Testimony Against: The higher education institutions reluctantly oppose this bill. We have a concern regarding mandatory waivers. Currently, institutions use much of their waiver authority for need-based assistance. In most cases this assistance is for undergraduate students who are not working or are working part time while pursuing a degree.

Creating mandatory waivers for teachers who already have a degree and are fully employed could have the unintended effect of displacing undergraduate students who are not fully employed and would not be rewarded with a potential salary increase. This bill would consume money from our institutions and would effectively be a budget cut to the state's higher education institutions of more than \$6 million in the next biennium. We respect the intent of the sponsor and would look forward to trying to find solutions.

Persons Testifying: (In support) Representative Ericks, prime sponsor; Gary King, Washington Education Association; and Elizabeth Cano, Edmonds School District.

(Opposed) Judy McNickle, Western Washington University and Council of Presidents.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.